

WALKS & GREENWAYS

The Beara Breifne Way

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRODUCT

An ambitious undertaking, the Beara Breifne Way project intends to develop a walking and cycling route along the spine of the country from Beara in County Cork to Breifne in County Leitrim, following the line of the historic march of O'Sullivan Beara.

This epic march was undertaken in 1602 over fourteen days by Donal Cam, Chieftain of the O'Sullivan Beara clan, and his followers in the aftermath of the Battle of Kinsale. Many clans were involved in both the march and skirmishes along the way and the story lends a fascinating historical and heraldic theme to the route, complimented by various sites and ruins along the way which will be archaeologically assessed and appropriately presented to users of the route.

A televised reconstruction of the march has been broadcast several times on RTE. The same characters and community groups shown on screen are currently participating in the project and it is astounding that such a distant event has so many local legends and details attached to it along the route – some of which are still hotly debated!

However, the Beara Breifne Way will not rely on this theme alone; all aspects of heritage are to be considered and to this end archaeological and ecological surveys are being undertaken and plaques and mapboards are to be erected covering topics ranging from local mythology to bird life and hedgerows.

More importantly, the route is being developed to the highest standards required by the National Way Marked Ways and will be subject to their inspections. Currently the project itself is in Phase I where routes in Cork, Tipperary and Galway are to be developed.

The Beara Breifne Way is unique in Ireland in terms of its size – when completed it will pass through counties Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Tipperary, Offaly, Galway, Roscommon, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim. In doing so the route will pass through the whole range of beautiful landscapes Ireland has to offer; seascapes, mountains, woodland, bogs, riversides and rolling farmlands included.

On a local level the route is divided into a series of smaller Ways, some of which are already in existence eg. The Beara Way, The Ballyhoura Way etc. Around these local walks and cycles it is hoped to develop a number of loops and spurs where there are features of interest away from the main route.

In time it is intended that all associated routes benefit from the high standards implied by the Beara Breifne branding.

DEVELOPMENT MODEL

This Way, as with many walking routes in Ireland, is founded on community groups and the good relations they maintain with local landowners. This is absolutely fundamental. No walk can exist without access agreements and these can only be arranged, in most cases, by someone known to the landowner. When you consider that there are 240 farmers on the Beara Way alone the scale of the community groups achievement can begin to be appreciated.

The project itself is currently in Phase I. In this phase routes in Cork, Tipperary and Galway are to be developed.

The funding partners for this phase are the Heritage Council, Failte Ireland, using ERDF monies and the three County Councils of Cork, S Tippereay and Galway. The five community groups, (Beara Tourism, IRD Duhallow, Ballyhoura Failte, Multeen Tourism, IRD South Galway) involved in this phase are also signatories to the agreement and have responsibility for the maintenance and future marketing of the route.

Beatrice Kelly of The Heritage Council is co-ordinating the project and the Council have employed a Project Manager, Gillian Scott and a Project Consultant, Jim O'Sullivan, to assist in the projects delivery. They are also providing administrative support.

Aside from Heritage Council monies, funding for the project works as follows:

- * The costs of roadworks carried out by the County Councils on the cycling portion of the route may be submitted to Failte Ireland as match-funding
- * Only that expenditure by the Councils which has been contracted out is eligible
- * Failte Ireland will then match this expenditure at a rate of 35 %
- * These monies are paid directly to the Councils according to EU funding rules
- * The Council passes this money back to the project
- * These monies are then used to develop the walking portion of the route and sign the cycling portion

Phase I must be completed by July of 2007.

GOING FORWARD

Aside from funding to complete the remaining sections of the route, the future success of this project relies on three fundamental issues:

1. Security of access
 2. Proper and active marketing
 3. The establishment of a body or person within an existing body, with overall responsibility for co-ordination of the route
-
1. Access is a difficult topic and is being dealt with at Government level. This project can do no more than await the outcome of current discussions. However, it is possible to state that, unless route lines are actually leased or purchased by the Government, involvement by community groups is the key to keeping the Beara Breifne Way running smoothly.
 2. The hardwork and significant funding which is being invested in this excellent product needs to be complemented by a suitable marketing budget. Failte Ireland recognises that walking and cycling are the key to bringing tourism to rural areas in this era of the city break. Fortunately for the Beara Breifne Way there are several different markets to which this product will appeal: long-distant walkers/cyclists; day-walkers/cyclists; those interest in any aspect of heritage from prehistory to natural history. It is important too to build a Beara-Breifne brand which will benefit the local promotional efforts.
 3. While access and marketing of individual Ways are local issues it is also important that there is some kind of central ownership of the Way so that it does not become fragmented. A co-ordinating body would be in a stronger position to deal with various agencies and ideally to administer a central maintenance budget so that standards do not decline or become inconsistent along the route. A suitable model for this will be explored by the project.